

ESSAYS



NOT QUITE ONE OF THE GUYS: PANTYSYLLYA AS VIRGIN WARRIOR IN LYDGATE'S *TROY BOOK*

In her book *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*, Barbara Ehrenreich tells us, "War is, in fact, one of the most rigidly 'gendered' activities known to mankind" (125). Since John Lydgate's *Troy Book* focuses on the Trojan War, and his patron King Henry V wished to promote the masculine code of chivalry through the work (Lydgate Prologue 71-83),¹ we cannot be surprised that Lydgate's Troy is a highly gendered world. Male characters in the *Troy Book* are generally knights (Bornstein 8-9), while female characters, like most women in romances, are excluded from warfare and public speaking and merely observe and grieve over battles (Allaire 36). Predictably, Lydgate's descriptions of his characters are also rigidly gendered. Lydgate attributes some qualities, such as beauty, wisdom, and worthiness, to both sexes. But he consistently attributes bravery, strength, chivalry, prowess, manhood, and anger only to male characters and generally assigns femininity, fidelity, and chastity to female characters.

But Lydgate blurs and violates his rigidly gendered characterizations in one case: the Amazon Queen Pantysylla, as she is called in the text, or Penthesilea, as she is generally called in translation and scholarship. Lydgate's first description of her emphasizes her womanliness and chastity as well as her martial attributes (*Troy Book* 4.3811; 4.4817-19); she indulges in cross-gendered acts such as weeping. More importantly, her femaleness is never disguised or denied, even when she engages in battle.² Lydgate always uses feminine pronouns and the feminine title *queen* for her. But Penthesilea is not exactly *womanly*, even by the standards of the text. Lydgate assigns her several of his male characters' qualities. For example, she does not observe passively on the walls while the men go out to fight; rather, she puts on her white armor and fights the Greeks. Penthesilea advises Priam, the Trojan King, perhaps in formal council, and he not only grants her a hearing but takes her advice. Given this mixture of manly and womanly actions and attributes, it seems that Lydgate does not quite know what to do with Penthesilea, and the critics do not either: *Troy Book* scholarship does not address the problem of Penthesilea's crossing of gender boundaries.

Sarah Salih, considering the mixed gender behavior of the Katherine Group's virgin martyrs, finds herself in a similar textual quandary. The author or authors of the Katherine Group emphasize the womanliness of the female saints, but also attribute to them unfeminine, if not masculine, qualities (98-

100). To tackle this dilemma, Salih turns to Judith Butler's theory of performative gender. According to Butler, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 179). In other words, gender is what one does; by acting manly or womanly, one becomes a man or a woman. Considering this theory, Salih points out that the virgin martyrs of the Katherine Group engage in unwomanly acts: eloquent speech, unwavering determination, spiritual strength, and rejection of their sexuality in a culture that defined women by sexual reproduction (99). Salih concludes that "'virginity' in the Katherine Group represents, in Butler's terms, a successful rearticulation of the heterosexual hegemony, and . . . it [virginity] can be understood as a distinct gender" (98).³ Virginity becomes, then, a gender between man and woman, characterized by "rejection of heterosexual relationships" and both manly and womanly qualities (Salih 100).

Although Salih addresses virgin martyrs specifically, her ideas of a third performative gender of virgin could apply to other types of textual virgins—virgin warriors, virgin queens, and virgin goddesses—if slightly adjusted to be more inclusive. Certainly, we must maintain the most central and distinguishing characteristic of the virgin: virginity. But we must add to and adapt Salih's other distinctive characteristics of the virgin martyrs, "eloquence, determination, and strength" (99). Most virgins are represented as eloquent, and we can also keep Salih's determination; many virgins are represented as remarkably tenacious, even in the face of great adversity or cultural conflict. But we must adjust Salih's strength to *either* mental *or* physical strength (often both). We must also add bravery, as most virgins, including the ones whom Salih discusses, are remarkably brave in the face of argument, torture, or battle. Furthermore, "biologically" female virgins—if one can speak rationally of a fictional character's biology—typically move, act, and succeed in masculine cultural realms and occupations generally closed to those gendered as women.⁴ Participation and success in these masculine arenas, such as battle, council, or government, indeed distinguishes virgins most decisively from women in the texts.

Given these criteria, Lydgate represents Penthesilea as a virgin: she rejects sexual relationships; exhibits masculine and feminine qualities; loves and grieves in both masculine and feminine ways; and crosses the gender barrier into the council room and the battlefield, where she succeeds as well as any other hero in the *Troy Book*. Classifying Penthesilea as a virgin would reconcile her unusual mixture of behavior and characteristics. But, as Butler reminds us, "gender is a performance with punitive consequences" (178). Although Lydgate constructs Penthesilea as a virgin and the narration generally praises her, the circumstances surrounding her death punish her for performing a third gender when her society—and Lydgate's—only permits two.⁵

The prerequisite for the virgin gender is, predictably, virginity, the rejection of heterosexual relationships. Accordingly, Lydgate tells us almost immediately that Penthesilea "had an honest name, Nat-withstondynge þe excelle of fame, Of hire renoun in armys and þe glorie." (*Troy Book* 4.3811-13)

Lydgate uses the word “honest” here, and generally, in the Shakespearean sense of “chaste” (McSparran meaning 4).⁶ By using the specific word “honest,” Lydgate also associates Penthesilea with the virginal women Cassandra and Polyxena, both of whom he calls honest (*Troy Book* 2.364; 2.371). By contrasting Penthesilea’s chastity with her prowess—she is chaste *despite* her martial abilities—Lydgate distinguishes Penthesilea from her Amazons, who are famous not only for their military exploits but their unconventional sexual practices (*Troy Book* 4.3768-3803), thus removing Penthesilea from the realm of unnatural, strange, and unchaste women and placing her in the more respectable category of virgin.

As a virgin, Penthesilea exhibits both womanly and manly characteristics. Lydgate does not extensively explore womanhood in *The Troy Book*, but he does describe Cassandra, Cressida, Hecuba, Helen, Medea, and Polyxena as womanly or having the quality of womanhood (*Troy Book* 2.4998-89; 3.4643 and 4646; 2.4966-72; 2.3648 and 3.3234; 1.1561, 1577, and 1603; 2.5047, 4.573 and 6706). What exactly Lydgate means by “womanly” is unclear but he explicitly constructs Penthesilea as superlatively womanly: “And ȝit, in soth, to speke of wommanhede, / For all her myȝt she had an huge pris” (*Troy Book* 4.3808-09).

The only distinctive qualities, other than womanliness, which Lydgate regularly ascribes to his women are fidelity and / or chastity. These qualities are not intrinsic to women; Lydgate describes both Helen and Cressida as womanly, yet neither is chaste or faithful, and Lydgate praises manly Troilus for his fidelity (*Troy Book* 2.3648; 3.3234; 3.4643; 3.4646; and 2.4874-79). Still, chastity and fidelity are *typical* traits of women: Lydgate constructs several exemplars of womanhood, including Andromache, Cassandra, Medea, Penelope, and Polyxena, as either chaste or faithful (*Troy Book* 2.4979-81; 2.363-64 and 4.5003-04; 1.2010 and 2856-57; 5.2162-64 and 5.2208; 2.370-71; 4.6704, 4.4750-52, and 5.2209). It would take considerable time and space to examine each of these examples of womanly chastity in the *Troy Book*, so, for convenience, let us examine part of Lydgate’s first full description of Andromache, during which he dwells on her chastity for some lines.

þe wif of Ector, hir [Hecuba’s] douȝter in lawe,
 After hir [Hecuba] lore mochel dide drawe,
 Andronomecha, þe feiþful trewe wyf,
 So good, so iust, þe whiche in al hir lyf,
 In honeste did hir moste delite— (*Troy Book* 2.4977-81)

Note the marked emphasis on Andromache’s chastity: she is “feiþful” *and* “trewe,” *and* delights in “honeste”—all in three lines. Lydgate mentions her chaste fidelity first, emphasizing it over Andromache’s beauty, courtesy, cheerfulness, diplomacy, and compassion. Penthesilea, as I have shown, also has the highly valued feminine attribute of chastity; Lydgate not only mentions her reputation for chastity but armors her in white, a color indicative of a female warrior’s purity in other medieval works (Allaire 36). And, like Andromache, Penthesilea is not only chaste but also faithful (and to the same man, incidentally): Lydgate tells us that she is “so loveinge & so trewe” to Hector (*Troy Book* 4.3851).

Although womanhood remains somewhat nebulous in the *Troy Book*, Lydgate explores the concept of manhood extensively. We can determine what qualities are proper to men and manhood by examining one description of the “Example and merour” of manhood, Hector (*Troy Book* 2.248). Lydgate gushes about Hector’s various virtues for forty-eight lines, beginning with his status as a paragon, a theme to which he often returns:

Pe first of birþe, so as bokis telle,
Was worþi Ector, of kny3thod spring & welle,
Flour of manhod, of strengþe pereles,
Sadde & discret & prudent neuere-þe-les,
Crop & rote, grounde of chivalrie. (*Troy Book* 2.4801-05)

Whatever a man (and a knight) should be, that Hector clearly is; he has no “perigal / . . . of manhod” (*Troy Book* 2.4842-43). Some traits of the perfect man, such as discretion and wisdom, are appropriate to both sexes in Lydgate’s world; Hecuba and Medea are also called discreet, and Cassandra and Hecuba are both wise (*Troy Book* 4.773; 1.3531; 3.4441; 2.4968). But among Hector’s qualities particular to men are first, physical strength (“of strengþe pereles”), and secondly, military prowess: “Was neuer noon þat fully my3t attayne / To þe prowes of þis worþi kny3t” and that “Prowes & vertu in him wer sette at reste” (*Troy Book* 4.4822-23; 4.4840). A perfect man rides to battle, and bravely: “he was neuer wery in bataille / Nor feint in hert his fomen to assaille” (*Troy Book* 4.4837-38). A bestial ferocity in war also characterizes men: “to his enmyes [he was] lyk a fers lyoun” (*Troy Book* 4.4832).

Lydgate usually assigns some of Hector’s qualities to other heroes of the text, often emphasizing one quality, such as ferocity in Achilles, to differentiate them. Yet, though no man in the *Troy Book* can aspire to Hector’s perfection, Lydgate describes all men as “manly,” sharing these common characteristics: “hardiness”—that is, fearlessness or a stout heart (McSparran meaning 1a); chivalry; cruelty; anger, fury, or ire; knighthood or knightliness; nobility; skill at arms; a similarity to lions, tigers, and sometimes boars; and “wodness”—more modernly, madness, but generally used in the *Troy Book* to denote a sort of berserker rage during battle.

The first table in the appendix shows that Lydgate lavishes these qualities on the greatest of his heroes—Achilles, Hercules, Jason, Troilus, Paris, Priam, Henry the Fifth—and most especially on Hector. Therefore, manhood must somehow be tied to or comprise these characteristics.

But although physically female, Penthesilea, as a virgin, exhibits many of these manly qualities. Lydgate calls Penthesilea hardy or attributes hardiness to her more often than he does to Achilles, Hector, or Troilus (*Troy Book* 4.3759, 3806, 3832, 3864, 3927, 3953, 3961, 4078, 4126, 4238, 4286, 4363-65; see Table 1). Like all the other (men) soldiers of the text and unlike any woman of the text, Penthesilea is skilled at arms. Lydgate emphasizes both “hir renoun in armys and þe glorie” and the proof of it, her “conquest and . . . hize victorie” when he first introduces her (*Troy Book* 4.3813; 4.3814). We see

further proof of Penthesilea's military skill when she marvelously defends herself from Pyrrhus and the Myrmidons "þoru3 hir prowessse" (*Troy Book* 4.4312). Penthesilea, like Hector, Achilles, and Troilus, is cruel, and Lydgate links her cruelty with her success in battle:

And Pantasillia was so mercyles
 Vp-on Grekis, þat of necessite,
 Þoru3 hir force and hir cruelte,
 Aforn hir swerd þei durste nat abide. (*Troy Book* 4.4108-11)

Notice too that Lydgate represents Penthesilea as strong; it is her "force" as well as her cruelty which drives the Greeks to retreat, and Lydgate in fact tells us early in his introduction of Penthesilea that she is "Ful renommed of strengþe & hardynes" (*Troy Book* 4.3806). She is also merciless, as are Hector, that paragon of manhood, and Mars, the god of war (*Troy Book* 3.1108, 3.1923, and 3.5267; Prologue 155). Lydgate further describes Penthesilea as "furious and wroth" when going into battle (*Troy Book* 4.4287), a trait she shares with Achilles, Hector, Mars, Priam, Pyrrhus, and Troilus (see Table 1). Finally, Lydgate calls Penthesilea "noble" (*Troy Book* 4.3961). Although the *Troy Book's* female population consists mostly of queens and princesses, no other female character is called noble, while many of the heroic, warrior men are (see Table 1). Penthesilea's qualities put her not only in good company, but in very manly company.

Lydgate frequently likens his warriors to lions, tigers, and boars in the *Troy Book* (see Table 1). Lydgate's tiger, according to Walsh, specifically represents cruelty, ferocity, mercilessness, and fury (296 and 300), and Lydgate attributes similar qualities to the lion and boar throughout the *Troy Book*. But although Lydgate compares women to tigers in other works (Walsh 303), he never compares any of the women characters in the *Troy Book* to tigers, or lions or boars. Such fierce and bestial qualities are apparently not womanly, and therefore are not included in Lydgate's descriptions of women. Yet Lydgate specifically likens Penthesilea to both a lion and a tiger:

And like a tigre in his gredinesse,
 Or like, in soth, to a lyounesse,
 þat day she ferde, ridynge vp & doun
 Amonge þe Grekis . . . (*Troy Book* 4.3901-04)

These similes differ from Lydgate's comparisons of the men to animals in only one respect: Lydgate represents Penthesilea as being like a "lyounesse," a specifically female animal, a concession to Penthesilea's female body. Yet Lydgate does not consistently emphasize her femaleness; Penthesilea is like a "tigre," not a tigress, which would rhyme as handily with "lyounesse" as "gredinesse" does. The switch between the comparison to male and female animals once again emphasizes Penthesilea's nebulous gender performance and gender.

Lydgate does not attribute to women the clearly manly qualities of hardness, cruelty, anger, nobility, skill at arms, and a likeness to lions and tigers. It is striking that the only “biologically” female character so described is Penthesilea,⁷ who must be something other than a woman. Some of the qualities which Lydgate gives to Penthesilea are identifiable characteristics of virgins: she is physically strong, for instance, and successful in the realm of battle, a masculine realm. Lydgate also tells us that Penthesilea is brave. Not only does she go into battle, but she encounters the best remaining Greek hero, Pyrrhus, “al deuoide of fere” (*Troy Book* 4.4165). Still, Lydgate gives her so many masculine qualities that we could easily argue that Lydgate constructs Penthesilea not as a virgin but as a man.

Tempting as that argument might be, Lydgate does not in fact represent Penthesilea as a man. Lydgate never describes her with three qualities attributed to all of the *Troy Book*’s important men characters and many of the minor ones: knightliness, chivalry, and manliness. Penthesilea is never described as manly; in fact, she is given the opposite quality of womanhood. Lydgate never calls Penthesilea chivalrous or shows her achieving great deeds specifically through her chivalry, a trope so common among the men of the text that it is almost cliché. Granted, Penthesilea wears spurs, one of the symbols of knighthood conferred upon Pyrrhus at his knighting (*Troy Book* 4.4294; 4.4003-06), and she certainly acts as the knights do. For these reasons, we might argue that she is effectively a knight, but Lydgate never calls Penthesilea a knight, nor does he say that she behaves in a knightly manner, nor that she possesses or demonstrates knighthood. Lydgate calls every warrior except Penthesilea in the *Troy Book* manly, chivalrous, and knightly—but every warrior except Penthesilea is a man. We can therefore conclude that manliness, chivalry, and knighthood are manly qualities appropriate *only* to men but that the qualities which Penthesilea shares with Lydgate’s men are appropriate to virgins as well as men.

Even though Penthesilea’s mixture of manly and womanly characteristics suggests that her gender is, at the very least, uncertain, her traits alone do not place her in a third, virgin gender. Gender, in Butler’s terms, does not reside in characteristics, but in action, in performance. Penthesilea performs in five major areas during her appearance in the text: love, grief, speech, war, and death. In each of these five areas, she acts in both manly and womanly ways, sometimes simultaneously. She therefore must fall between or beside the genders of woman and man, into the more flexible gender of virgin.

Both men and women characters in the *Troy Book* participate in love. Achilles loves and pursues Polyxena, and Medea loves and pursues Jason, for instance. But it is somewhat surprising to find that Penthesilea, an Amazon renowned for her chastity, also loves:

Pe whiche [Penthesilea] loued with al hir hoole herte
 Worpi Hector, and with al her myzt,
 Only for he was so noble a knyzt,
 Pat hir Ioye & worldly plesaunce,

Hir hertly ese & souereyne soffisaunce,
In verray soth, where she wake or winke,
Was euere in oon vp-on hym to þinke,
Of verray feith, with-uten any sloupe. (*Troy Book* 4.3820-27)

This description suggests a romantic, courtly love. Like many medieval courtly lovers, for instance, Penthesilea thinks obsessively about Hector “where she wake or winke” (*Troy Book* 4.3825). Lydgate emphasizes her “feith” and her active loving (she loves “with-uten any sloupe”), two virtues of any courtly lover.

Since both men and women love, Penthesilea’s ability to love does not determine her gender. But Lydgate hints that Penthesilea loves Hector both in manly and womanly fashion. Hector is Penthesilea’s “Ioye & worldly plesaunce” and she loves him “Only for he was so noble a kny3t,” while Troilus is described as Cressida’s “owne kni3t, hir lust, hir liues Ioye,” and Helen believes that Paris is “to hir plesaunce” (*Troy Book* 4.3823; 3:4120; 2.3705). Although such descriptions might emphasize the womanly nature of her love, Penthesilea’s love for Hector is not the same as Helen’s for Paris or Cressida’s for Troilus. For one thing, Lydgate insists on Penthesilea’s virginity and chastity, qualities not attributed to Helen or Cressida and which emphasize Penthesilea’s status as virgin.

Secondly, Penthesilea and Hector’s love does not consist of courtly love formalities. Rather, the love between Penthesilea and Hector is characterized by friendly elements attributed elsewhere in the *Troy Book* to relationships between men. In the description of Penthesilea’s love, cited above, Lydgate specifically echoes his description of Achilles and Patroclus’s affection:

Now was þer euere swiche affeccioun
Of entere loue, troupe, & feithfulnes,
So gret desyre and inward kyndenes,
Besy þinkyng, & so gret feruence,
So moche frendeschip & þou3tful aduertence,
So huge brennyng, passyng amerous,
Betwixe Achilles & þis Patroclus,
Pat her hertis were lokkid in o cheyne. (*Troy Book* 3.604-611)

While the passage certainly contains passionate elements, Lydgate gives no evidence of a sexual relationship between Achilles and Patroclus; their love is apparently a deep and loyal friendship. And the diction here parallels the description of Penthesilea’s love for Hector. As Patroclus and Achilles is based on “troupe, & feithfulnes,” Penthesilea is “so trewe” to Hector, and she has committed to Hector “be bond of troupe” (*Troy Book* 4.3851; 4.3828). Both loves are active: the love between Achilles and Patroclus is full of “Besy þinkyng” while Penthesilea loves Hector “with-uten any sloupe” and thinks about him day and night (*Troy Book* 3.607; 4.3827; 4.3825). Lydgate also characterizes both friendships as “affeccioun” (*Troy Book* 3.604; 4.3829). And Penthesilea is later called “Confederat” to Hector, a word that is used elsewhere in the *Troy Book* to mean bound by some sort of covenant which

makes the participants friends or allies (*Troy Book* 4.3829).⁸ Considering Lydgate's superlative admiration for Hector, Lydgate is honoring Penthesilea over and above any of the other heroes of the text by making her Hector's only affectionate friend and ally. But no women are bound "confederat"; Penthesilea's relationship with Hector must be a manly one. Such a relationship is permitted to Penthesilea only because she is not a woman, but a virgin.

As a virgin, Penthesilea also performs her grief in both manly and womanly ways, once again not falling neatly into the mores of man or woman. Lydgate only briefly describes her profound sorrow over Hector's death:

Anoon she gan to chaungen cher and hewe,
 And pitously for to wepe & crye,
 And ferd in soth as she wolde deye
 For verray wo and hertly hevynes. (*Troy Book* 4.3852-55)

Penthesilea's grief at first echoes Helen's mourning for Paris. Helen, when confronted with Paris's corpse, "Wailleth, crieth" for her dead husband, and behaves "Like as she wolde with hym dye anoon" (*Troy Book* 4.3625; 4.3631). Helen's face also changes from "Hir natif colour and hir rody hewe" to "asshes colde" (*Troy Book* 4.3639; 4.3641).

But Priam also weeps and acts as if he would die when Paris dies, and Achilles weeps for Patroclus (*Troy Book* 4.3609-15; 3:2190). Yet men's grief begins with tears, but ends with actions, and Penthesilea's grief ultimately follows the masculine pattern. Achilles and Priam begin their time of mourning with weeping and end it with building tombs (*Troy Book* 3.2194-95; 4.3722-27). As Hector is already entombed, Penthesilea determines on another manly action instead: "And þouȝt she wold þoruȝ hir worþines / Avenge his deth, platly, ȝif she may, / On þe Grekis. . ." (*Troy Book* 4.3856-58). Granted, Hecuba conspires with Paris to murder Achilles to avenge Hector and Troilus, but revenge in battle rather than the mere plotting of revenge, is the manly response to grief. For instance, after the death of his cousin Protenor, we read that Achilles "To ben avengid he was ful desirous," and he proceeds to attack Hector (*Troy Book* 3.2642). Later, in 3.3819-22, Achilles announces his intention to be avenged on Hector for the latter's besting of him, and for killing Patroclus: "For vp-on þe, only for his [Patroclus's] sake, / Of cruel deth vengauce shal be take" (*Troy Book* 3.3847-48). It is significant that Patroclus dies nearly a thousand lines before Achilles announces his plan to take vengeance on Hector, while Penthesilea decides to avenge Hector almost instantaneously, and specifically in the manly arena of war. And Lydgate even obliquely praises this action: Penthesilea will conduct her revenge "þoruȝ hir worþines" (*Troy Book* 4.3856). And in the pursuit of revenge, she demonstrates the virgin's typical determination. She never wavers from her decision to avenge Hector and only ceases her pursuit of the Greeks when they kill her.

Immediately after Lydgate reports Penthesilea's decision to avenge Hector, he moves her not into the battlefield, as we might expect, but into the specifically masculine field of speech. Allaire, in her study on late medieval Italian prose epics, notes that men characters are allowed public speech, while women characters must remain silent and submissive (37). This pattern holds true in the *Troy Book*. Lydgate depicts only the prophetess Cassandra speaking specifically in any public forum at all, and then at unofficial occasions: Paris and Helen's wedding and, later, after the funeral of Cassibellan. And Lydgate, following his source, shows the disrespect given to Cassandra's public speech: she is imprisoned for speaking.⁹ Yet once again, Penthesilea, as a virgin, is permitted masculine privileges. Directly after determining to avenge Hector,

She preieth Priam, with gret affecciou,
 For to oppene þe gatis of þe toun,
 And to gon oute with Grekis for to fiȝt
 Pat þei may knowe & be expert ariȝt
 Of þis womman þe gret worþines,
 And of þis quene þe famous hardines. (*Troy Book* 4.3859-64)

It is manly that she advises the king, as women are not apparently permitted to do it, but Lydgate's diction downplays this masculine speech-action. Penthesilea "preieth" to go out and fight, just as the anxious Andromache "preieth" Priam to keep Hector at home; Priam does not take her advice but rather grants her "requeste" (*Troy Book* 3.4977; 4.3866). Such diction converts Penthesilea's advice into pleading for a favor, thus feminizing her performance here, but there is no disguising that Penthesilea offers specifically *military* advice. Her performance is therefore manly as well as womanly. And although Lydgate does not dramatize the scene, Penthesilea must speak with the eloquence characteristic of virgins, for she has the distinction of being the only female character in the *Troy Book* whose advice Priam takes, though with disparagingly little confidence: "And so þe kyng, hopynge for þe beste, / With-oute abood graunted hir requeste" (*Troy Book* 4.3865-66).

The battlefield, like speech, is a specifically masculine venue for performance, and war, until recently, an activity reserved only for men, in cultural construction if not in actual fact. Barbara Ehrenreich finds that war serves "to *define* manhood itself . . . In historic times, one of the acknowledged purposes of war has often been to make men 'men,' that is, to give the adult male something uniquely 'manly' to do" (127). These simple facts are often invisible in our culture, and in many texts. But Lydgate *specifically* connects warfare to manhood and manliness to military prowess and victory; men fight well and triumph over enemies because of their manliness. For example, Hector, rescuing Polydamas,

put þe Grekis in so gret distresse,
 þoruȝ his manhod and his worþines,

Pat wher-so-euere þilke day he rood,
His sharpe sword he baped in her blood. (*Troy Book* 3.5263-66)

Lydgate credits Hector's manliness—as well as his worthiness, a cross-gender quality—with his gruesomely decisive success here. And not only is victory a product of manhood, war is reserved for the men only. Lydgate generally represents his women as observers, victims, or prizes.¹⁰

Yet Penthesilea rides to war; she performs on equal terms and with equal skill in the manly arena of the battlefield. Lydgate describes her duel with Pyrrhus much in the same fashion as the duels between other Greek and Trojan heroes, as a fifteenth-century tilting match (Bornstein 9), a match which she decisively wins (*Troy Book* 4.4162-81). Lydgate makes Pyrrhus quite formidable: he is “pale and furious” and full of “hate & of wodnes”; he fights with “al hi myȝt & peyne”; and unhorsed, he tenaciously refuses to surrender or flee but rather fights fiercely (*Troy Book* 4.4162; 4.4176; 4.4163; 4.4169-77). Pyrrhus, the son of the legendary Achilles, is one of the great Greek warriors of the text, and, in fact, the ranking Greek hero at this point in the story. Yet Penthesilea wins in battle against him, and does so in a praiseworthy fashion: Lydgate commends her worthiness, her fearlessness, and her strength directly, and by representing her victory, obliquely praises her skill (*Troy Book* 4.4175; 4.4165; 4.4178-79).

And like most of the named heroes in the *Troy Book*, Penthesilea succeeds tremendously not only in individual combats but as a general. She slaughters greatly on all sides, forces the Greeks to retreat, and nearly drives them off the shores of Troy (*Troy Book* 4.3932-44). Penthesilea undoubtedly wins a great though incomplete victory at this point, and Lydgate praises it: her skill and its results are so great that they are “incredible” and “impossible” (*Troy Book* 4.3934; 4.3935). While it may indeed be that such skill and victory are unbelievable because of Penthesilea's femaleness, it may also simply be an acknowledgement of her great skill both as a warrior and a commander, or of the Greeks' disbelief at their failure to stop her. After all, only two other Trojan commanders come close to forcing the Greeks out of Trojan territory: Hector, who forces the Greeks to flee to their tents, and Troilus, who loses his advantage through a truce (*Troy Book* 3.1932-2154 and 4.1630-43).

If women are barred from battle but Penthesilea is allowed to fight, she must be something other than a woman, and that “something” is a virgin. Indeed, her success in the very manly venue of war marks her as a virgin; virgins succeed in areas generally closed to women. Yet the gender “virgin” is not officially recognized by the fictional society of the text nor by Lydgate's society, and gender is not only performative. Gender is also society's perception and judgment of the performance. And as Butler reminds us, “we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (178). The Greek society of the *Troy Book* judges Penthesilea to be a woman because of her female body, but she obviously is not performing “woman” correctly, as Pyrrhus venomously points out: “it was shame & villenye / For þe wommen so

to lese her lond / And to be sleyn so felly of her hond" (*Troy Book* 4. 4114-16).¹¹ Pyrrhus specifically blames the "wommen," not knights or soldiers, which the Amazons effectively are. Worse, Penthesilea and the Amazons are not only slaying men, but slaying them "felly," thus performing an evil version of "woman," one who behaves foully. To add insult to injury, Penthesilea and her Amazons are apparently interfering with the Greek men's ability to do *their* gender right. Lydgate says that Penthesilea "Poru3 her force" rescues Philomene "Maugre þe manhood of Mirundones" (*Troy Book* 4.4106; 4107). As Pyrrhus points out, the Greeks will not gain the proper social confirmation of their manhood if Penthesilea and the Amazon troops continue to overcome them:

For, but 3if we som remedie shape
 Pis ilke day her force to confounde,
 Shamful report to vs shal rebounde,
 Perpetuelly, wher we slepe or wake! (*Troy Book* 4.4120-23)

Their defeat at Penthesilea's hands—no matter her skill, bravery, and tenacity—will ruin the Greeks' reputations "[p]erpetuelly." Since no shame is attached to the Greeks because of Hector's or Troilus's victories, the shame must come from the fact that Penthesilea is one of the "wommen." Ruining the Greeks' social standing as "men," Penthesilea must be stopped, must be punished.

We can see her punishment nowhere so clearly as in the circumstances surrounding her death. Her death itself is not punitive; Lydgate grants her the same praiseworthy battle-death as manly men such as Hector and Troilus. As Table 2 in the appendix shows, the sequence of events leading to her death, her being surrounded, then disarmed, and finally killed by dismemberment, is *exactly* the same sequence of events visited on Troilus, Lydgate's second Hector. Troilus's death reflects no dishonor on him, but rather shames Achilles and his Myrmidons for fighting unchivalrously, as Lydgate discusses at great length (*Troy Book* 4.2780-2855). Penthesilea's death must not therefore reflect dishonor on her, but rather, through its close resemblance to Troilus's treacherous death, on the Greeks.

Indeed, Lydgate laments Penthesilea in his narration as a bulwark of Troy, just as he laments Hector and Troilus, and even shows the Trojans grieving over her death in ways that recall the mourning for the two Trojan princes. Lydgate's narrator laments Penthesilea's death as a loss of a general and a defender of the town:

O 3e Troyens! 3e stonden in grete drede,
 Amyd þe feld al oute of gouernance!
 Þe day is come of 3oure vnhappi chaunce:
 For now haue 3e leder noon nor gyde— (*Troy Book* 4.4366-69)

Lydgate emphasizes Penthesilea's roles as a leader and a protector. Her death leaves Troy vulnerable—the same ideas emphasized in the laments of other

great Trojan heroes. When Hector has died, Lydgate tells us that the Trojans have “Loste þi diffence and þi stronge wal” and “þi sheld” (*Troy Book* 3.5483; 3.5497). And after Troilus’s death, Lydgate wonders, “who shal her [the Trojans] socour be” (*Troy Book* 4.3069). He also attributes to Penthesilea the hyperbolic mourning that results from Hector and Troilus’s demise. All Troy weeps for Hector and Troilus (*Troy Book* 3.5495-5527; 4.3035-44); the grief over Troilus is barely describable (*Troy Book* 4.3004-06). Trojan sorrow over Penthesilea is remarkably similar—a profound mourning supposedly beyond Lydgate’s powers of description:

And, in þis while, with-Inne Troie toun,
 More þan I can make descripcioun,
 For þe quene þer was so gret a sowre
 Of euery whiȝt, boþe at eve & morwe. (*Troy Book* 4.4407-10)

The Trojans even wish to bury her “With reuerence and wiþ honour dwe” and petition the Greeks to return her body “With gret praier and grete besynes” (*Troy Book* 4.4415; 4.4417). Clearly, Lydgate is neither criticizing nor punishing Penthesilea’s performance as a virgin by lamenting her as a mainstay of Troy or by reporting the Trojans’ grief and respect for her.

However, the circumstances immediately following her death demonstrate the Greeks’ determination to punish her for not performing her gender correctly. Granted, Penthesilea’s death parallels Troilus’s—but only to a point. Achilles simply beheads Troilus, whereas Pyrrhus, out of “malys,” “hath hir hewe al on pecis smale” (*Troy Book* 4.2760-63; 4.4337; and 4.4340). Troilus is dismembered once, beheaded like a Roman noble; Penthesilea must be dismembered more than once, like a base English traitor. The Greeks’ disrespect to the bodies of both Troilus and Penthesilea also differs according to their perceived gender. Achilles drags Troilus’s corpse around the field (*Troy Book* 4.2773-79), but Lydgate attributes this to Achilles’s cruelty (*Troy Book* 4.2773; 4.2781). On the other hand, the Greeks consider feeding Penthesilea to the dogs “Only of malys and of hoot envie,” an action which Pyrrhus, surprisingly, opposes (*Troy Book* 4.4421; 4.4426-27). As a compromise, the Greeks unceremoniously dump the remainder of Penthesilea’s corpse into a lake *specifically* because of her success on the field: “it was fittyng / Pat she faile of hir buryng, / Pat slayen hadde so many worþi man” (*Troy Book* 4.4429-31). Hector, Troilus, and Paris also slew many worthy men. Yet the Greeks respect Hector and Paris’s bodies and, though Achilles refuses to allow Troilus’s burial, the reason is Achilles’s cruelty, not Troilus’s effectiveness. The difference between Hector, Troilus, and Paris on the one hand, and Penthesilea on the other, is that Hector, Troilus, and Paris are “biologically” male and performing the gender “man,” while Penthesilea is “biologically” female and performing a gender that is *not* “woman.” In other words, it is not fitting that a *woman* should slay worthy men and thereby endanger their performance as “men”—although it is this very success in the battle that places Penthesilea in the virgin gender.

Oddly, Lydgate as narrator does not punish or condemn Penthesilea. In her death and the disrespect shown to her corpse, Lydgate follows his source, Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (see Book XXIX), but not without comment. Lydgate condemns Pyrrhus's butchering of Penthesilea's body as "to foule a cruel dede" and the plan to throw her corpse to the dogs as "foule" (*Troy Book* 4.4341; 4.4427). In stark contrast, the Trojans show her corpse great respect, when they finally manage to get their hands on it.

And, for loue of þis worpi quene,
 Of purid golde & of stonys shene
 He lete make a vessel ful royal
 And filde it ful of bawme natural
 To kepe þe cors fro corrupcioun
 Til þe werre of Grekis & þe toun
 Poruþ þe trete were y-stynted clene. (*Troy Book* 4.5385-91)

Priam not only cares for Penthesilea's body respectfully but richly: her funereal vessel is truly "royal," with its gold construction and brilliant stones. These details are not in de Colonne's *Historia*. Lydgate's additions here and his respectful handling of the funeral may reflect the traditional medieval admiration for Amazons (Friedman 129). But these details do not merely show respect; they echo the entombment of the greatest hero of the text, Hector, whose tabernacle, like Penthesilea's funereal vessel, is "of fyn gold" and "Fret ful of stonys, riche and precious" (*Troy Book* 3.5630; 3.5632). Hector's corpse is also preserved by a "bawme" which works so well that Hector still seems alive: "He was conserued lifly of colour" (*Troy Book* 3.5684; 3.5682). Once again, Penthesilea is being treated like one of the manly heroes—in fact, like *the* manly hero of the text, Hector.

But, as we have seen, Lydgate never fully constructs Penthesilea as a man, and, in fact, he tries desperately to mark her as a woman. He last mentions her in one of his responses to the *Historia*'s anti-feminist tirades. In sum, Lydgate demands that when de Colonne condemns the infidelity of Helen, Cressida, and Medea, he should, to be fair, consider the virtues of Penelope, Polyxena, Hecuba, Cassandra, and, finally, of Penthesilea (*Troy Book* 5.2204-17). By including Penthesilea in this catalog, Lydgate is affirming her womanhood. Indeed, Lydgate argues, she is a *good* woman, one who has performed the gender "woman," and has done it well. Yet Lydgate also shows her performing actions proper to the gender "man," and doing it well. Placing Penthesilea in the "virgin" gender, which encompasses both manly and some womanly behavior, reconciles Penthesilea's contradictory performances. But Lydgate's society does not allow for the "virgin" gender, and he cannot place her there explicitly—even if he had thought to do so. Lydgate therefore settles for making this hardy, worthy, fearless, leonine, tiger-like, cruel, merciless, and angry warrior-general into a paragon of womanhood praised specifically for her "kyndenes" (*Troy Book* 5.2212).

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Appendix

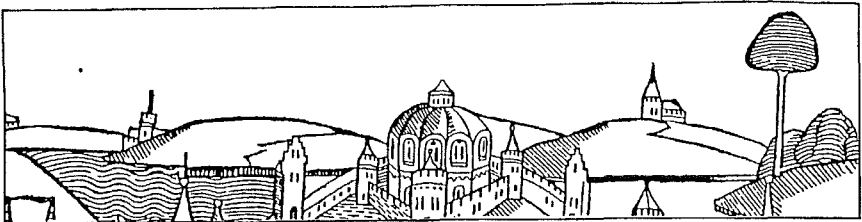
Table 1
Assignment of Qualities in Lydgate's *Troy Book* by Sex

Quality	Male Characters (Number of Times Used)	Female Characters (Number of Times Used)
anger / ire / fury	Achilles (7), Hector (8), Hercules (1), Mars (1), Priam (2), Pyrrhus (5), Troilus (1)	Penthesilea (2)
chastity		Cassandra (2), Medea (2), Penelope (2), Polyxena (5)
chivalry	Achilles (1), Hector (4), Henry V (1), Hercules (1), Mars (1), Troilus (1)	
cruelty	Achilles (9), Hector (4), Hercules (1), Priam (1), Pyrrhus (2), Troilus (1)	Penthesilea (1)
fidelity / troth	Troilus (1)	Andromache (3), Penthesilea (2)
hardiness (bravery)	Achilles (10), Agamemnon (1), Hector (3), Hercules (2), Priam (1),	Penthesilea (12), Amazons (1)
honesty	Troilus (1; used in the modern sense)	Andromache (1), Cassandra (1), Medea (1), Penthesilea (1), Polyxena (1)
kighthood / knightliness	Achilles (10), Agamemnon (4), Hector (23), Henry V (5), Hercules (2), Jason (2), Mars (1), Paris (4), Priam (7), Pyrrhus (1), Troilus (17), Ulysses (3)	
lion	Achilles (3), Hector (14), Hercules (1), Pyrrhus (2)	Penthesilea (1)
madness / "wodness"	Achilles (5), Hector (4), Hercules (1), Mars (1), Pyrrhus (4), Troilus (4), Ulysses (1)	Amazons (2)
manhood / manliness	Achilles (9), Agamemnon (2), Hector (24), Henry V (3), Hercules (2), Jason (6), Mars (1), Paris (3), Priam (4), Troilus (14), Ulysses (2)	Hecuba (1; in looks)
nobility	Achilles (5), Agamemnon (5), Hector (9), Henry V (3), Mars (1), Menelaus (1), Paris (2), Priam (4), Troilus (2), Ulysses (1)	Penthesilea (2)
skill / prowess (martial)	Achilles (3), Agamemnon (1), Hector (6), Henry V (2), Mars (1), Menelaus (1), Priam (1), Troilus (5)	Penthesilea (1)
tiger	Achilles (2), Hector (4), Hercules (1), Pyrrhus (2), Troilus (2)	Penthesilea (1)
womanhood / womanliness		Andromache (1), Cassandra (1), Cressida (2), Hecuba (4), Helen (2), Medea (3), Penelope (1), Penthesilea (3), Polyxena (3)

1. The study behind Table 1 restricts itself to the following characters: Achilles, Agamemnon, Hector, Henry V, Hercules, Jason, Mars, Menelaus, Paris, Priam, Pyrrhus, Troilus, Ulysses, Andromache, Cassandra, Cressida, Hecuba, Helen, Medea, Pallas-Minerva, Penelope, Penthesilea, and Polyxena.
2. The study behind Table 1 tallies all forms of the quality (nominative, adjectival, adverbial, and verbal) in the same slot. In other words, Lydgate's use of the words "kighthood," "knightly," and "knight" are tallied under "kighthood."
3. These qualities occur many other times in the *Troy Book* in descriptions of minor characters.
4. It is entirely possible that I have missed some mentions of these qualities.

Table 2
Troilus and Penthesilea's Deaths

Elements	Troilus	Penthesilea
Surrounding	After Troilus makes a great slaughter, the Myrmidons surround him, but he defends himself manfully and kills many of them (4.2715-2736)	After Penthesilea wounds Pyrrhus, the Greeks surround her, but she defends herself marvelously. (4.4307-13)
Disarming	The Myrmidons systematically hack off Troilus' helmet and armor, baring his head and neck. (4.2745-2755)	The Greeks hew off Penthesilea's helmet, mail, and rerebrace, baring her head and shoulders. (4.4314-20)
Death by Dismemberment	Achilles sneaks up and beheads Troilus from behind. (4.2760-63)	Pyrrhus charges Penthesilea despite his wound. She attempts to defend herself, but is too closely surrounded. Pyrrhus cuts off her arm and shoulder then proceeds to hack her body into small pieces. (4.4321-41)
Disrespect to the Corpse	Achilles drags Troilus' corpse behind his horse's tail. (4.2773-79)	After some discussion about throwing Penthesilea's corpse to the dogs, the Greeks, on Diomedes's advice, throw the corpse into a lake near Troy. (4.4419-39)



¹ Subsequent references to the *Troy Book* will be made by title.

² Such is not the case for all fictional female warriors of the time period. Silence in the romance that bears her name, and her analog Grisandolus in *The Prose Merlin* both disguise themselves as men. Even the Virgin Mary, in the Caxton translation of the Golden Legend disguises herself as a man in order to fight (see "The Nativity of Our Lady"). The tradition continues well into the Renaissance with Britomartis of *The Faerie Queene* and Viola of *Twelfth Night*, as well as several female warriors in various seventeenth century ballads.

³ Although Salih's theory about the virgin martyrs is interesting, and the idea of a third gender useful, I disagree that the virgin martyrs comprise a third gender. Male and female virgin martyrs are clearly gendered into masculine and feminine virgin martyrs; masculine ones are called "miles Christi" (or its vernacular equivalent), do not have their beauty discussed, and avoid sexual threat by marrying a woman who converts and conveniently agrees to a chaste marriage. Female virgin martyrs are not called soldiers of Christ, are emphatically beautiful, and avoid sexual threat only through death, which is often metaphorically equated to a marriage with Christ. Please see the first chapter of my forthcoming dissertation, *Arms and the Woman: A Study of Women Warriors in Medieval English Literature*.

⁴ It is certainly possible for a male character to fall into the third gender of virgin; perhaps the most well-known character of this type is Galahad, whose "strength is as the strength of ten / Because my heart is pure" (Tennyson 3-4). But male virgins are harder to distinguish from men than female virgins from women, because eloquence, determination, strength, bravery, and success in masculine realms is expected of men as well as male virgins. In the case of male virgin characters, it is often only their virginity which distinguishes them from their men colleagues.

⁵ Cassandra may also fall into the category of virgin: she moves in the manly realm of the council, offering well-considered advice to Priam and the nobility of Troy, and later to the Greeks. Yet, unlike Penthesilea, she does not seem to be successful. Her advice is rejected, and she is imprisoned twice for offering it. It cannot be because of the advice itself; Cassandra's advice repeats advice already offered by male characters. It is, rather, that Cassandra as a "woman" has trespassed in the manly realm of the council; she is not performing what society judges to be her proper gender (woman, not virgin) and is therefore punished. Later, the Greeks allow her to prophesy without penalty—a perfect inversion of Penthesilea, whose performances in the masculine arena are accepted and praised by the Trojans and ultimately rejected and punished by the Greeks.

⁶ Lydgate uses the word "honest" once in the more modern sense of "Truthful, honest, frank" to describe Troilus (*Troy Book* 2.4882; McSparran, definition 5).

⁷ Occasionally, Lydgate attributes some of these manly qualities to the Amazons at large; they are called hardy, angry, and mad (*Troy Book* 4.4203; 4.4354; 4.4354 and 4359). But the Amazons function mainly as an extension of Penthesilea herself, just as the Myrmidons function as an extension of Achilles. As the Myrmidons follow wherever Achilles leads and ape his behavior and emotions, the Amazons follow Penthesilea wherever and howsoever she leads them

⁸ See *Troy Book* 2.6018, 2.6047; 2.7343, 4.4696, 5.538, 5.752, 5.1022 for other uses of "confederat" as bound by covenant. Lydgate does not specify that a "bond confederat" is necessarily military, but with Penthesilea and Hector, the alliance probably is, at least in some part, military. Lydgate's source, the *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, specifically attributes the bond between Hector and Penthesilea to "sue strennuitatis nimium probitatem" "the exceeding merit of her valor" (de Columbis 212; delle Colonne 203).

⁹ See also *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (delle Colonne 7.462-94, 16.29-40) In both Lydgate and delle Colonne, Priam ignores Cassandra's advice, just as he ignores Helenus and Penthus, whose warnings Cassandra repeats (*Troy Book* 2.2908-3069; 2.3152-3211). More significantly, Priam twice imprisons Cassandra for uttering her counsel, a fate not suffered by Helenus or Penthus (*Troy Book* 2.4244-48 and 3.2294-96). No matter how good or true the advice, apparently women are not permitted to speak in Lydgate's Troy or in delle Colonne's.

¹⁰ Hecuba's plot to murder Achilles and Cassandra's loud but ignored prophecy are the closest any of the women characters come to direct participation in the war.

¹¹ Interestingly, neither the Trojans, nor Lydgate in his narration, object to Penthesilea's participation or success on behalf of the Trojans.